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ABSTRACT

Fuller's theoretical model of concerns was the conceptual framework used in studying concerns, problems, and stress levels of three cohorts of interns undergoing transition into teaching. Independent variables examined included undergraduate grade point averages, subject area specializations, age, and personality. Subjects were fifth-year beginning teachers seeking licensure through a non-degree alternative program. All completed a year-long internship in public schools. Concerns data were obtained in summer, fall, and spring; weekly problems and stress were observed at four times during the school year. Concern levels were statistically different at various points in time with self-concerns high in the summer and management concerns most evident in the fall. Impact concerns generally increased in the spring semester. Variations found between the three cohorts are attributed to program modifications and increased induction support emerging over the three year period. Some differences were found among concern levels according to age, undergraduate grade point averages, subject areas taught, and personality factors. No differences were noted for stress levels and weekly problems. The findings support the idea that the year-long internship and transition support can be effective in assisting beginning teachers in moving through the developmental stages of learning to teach. (Author)

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A Study of Factors Associated with Fifth-Year Teacher Interns' Concerns, Problems, and Stress

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Abstract

Fuller's theoretical model of concerns was the conceptual framework used in studying concerns, problems, and stress levels of three cohorts of interns undergoing transition into teaching. Independent variables examined included undergraduate grade point averages, subject area specializations, age and personality. Subjects were fifth-year beginning teachers seeking licensure through a non-degree alternative program. All completed a year-long internships in public schools. Concerns data were obtained at three points in time (summer, fall and spring); weekly problems and stress observed at four times during the school year. Concern levels were statistically different at various points in time with self concerns high in the summer and management concerns most evident in the fall. Impact concerns generally increased in the spring semester, as expected. Variations found between the three cohorts are attributed to program modifications and increased induction support emerging over the three year period. Some differences were found among concern levels according to age, undergraduate grade point averages, subject areas taught and personality factors. No differences were noted for stress levels and weekly problems. The findings support the idea that the year-long internship and transition support can be effective in assisting beginning teachers in moving through the developmental stages of learning to teach.

Beginning to teach has been described as "perilous and fraught with risks...a time of entering an unknown territory...a major life-change. It is not surprising that its onset arouses anxiety and fear," concluded McDonald and Elias, (1982, p. 1). They observed that:

> ".. we know very little about who feels unprepared or to what degree: we know little about the differences among teachers in terms of their personality characteristics as these affect their perceptions of their problems, and we know practically nothing about how differences in the social systems in schools in which teachers begin to teach influence the kinds of problems they have...Such knowledge is necessary if we are to understand the causal factors underlying the ways in which teachers react to the experiences they are having." (1982, pp.. 21-22).

Thus, more developmental studies of beginning teachers are needed. Moreover, study of transition/induction experiences provided by internships is especially timely, given current reforms in teacher education which call for using innovative strategies for inducting novices into teaching.

The teaching internship has been proposed as an improved way of inducting teachers into their roles and reducing the trauma typically experienced by beginners (A nation at risk, 1983; Tomorrow's teachers, 1986; A nation prepared, 1986). Internship experiences, while associated with numerous variations in design, are viewed as approximating regular teaching. Common internship features include reduced teaching load, on-site support, and instruction specifically designed to assist beginners in dealing with experiences of the transition phase. With these features, it is believed, the internship may provide an effective way of inducting teachers into the profession (McDonald, 1980). This study was undertaken to contribute to an empirically-based literature through which the specific value of the internship might be established.

The present study was conceptually gounded on Fuller's model of teacher concerns (1969), as extended by Hall, Wallace & Dossett (1973). Fuller's theory explains changes in perceptions and feelings as developmental and contingently related to experiential factors impinging on the life-spaces of individuals. If these developmental concerns are dealt with, it is believed, then teachers can better adapt to the schools or make

meaningful changes to improve situations in the workplace. Moreover, planned interventions during the transition period can be designed to lessen the trauma of beginning to teach and facilitate the professional development of novices.

Purpose of the Study

The major questions addressed in the study were:

1. Do interns reflect variations in concerns at selected times during the teaching internship?
2. Do interns vary in concerns according to undergraduate grade point averages, subject area specialization, age and personality factors?
3. Do interns vary in stress levels and concerns reflected in weekly problems at selected times during the internship?
4. Do interns vary in stress levels and concerns reflected in weekly problems according to undergraduate grade point averages, subject area specialization, age, and personality factors?

Procedures

Subjects

Subjects were three cohorts of fifth-year teacher interns being inducted into teaching through year-long internships in the public schools during the 1985-86, 1986-87, and 1987-88 school years. As individuals seeking teacher licensure through a non-degree alternative program design, all held baccalaureate degrees in their teaching areas, participated in an intensive summer program designed to develop teaching skills and provide background information about teaching in the secondary schools, and served as teachers-of-record for the school year. Candidates for the program were jointly selected by college and school system representatives, primarily to teach in critical need areas, such as mathematics, science, foreign language and English. They were responsible for teaching three classes while enrolled in one course and a professional seminar on campus each semester of the school year. School-site support was provided through mentor teams composed of teacher practitioners and university faculty

from the Colleges of Education and Arts and Sciences. Data reported here were obtained from 42 interns, including 10 in cohort one, 19 in cohort two, and 13 in cohort three. Ages ranged from 23 to 49 with a mean of 30.88. There were 28 females and 14 males, 7 blacks and 35 whites. Undergraduate GPAs ranged from 2.20 to 3.88, with a mean of 2.99.

Instrumentation

Data utilized in answering the research questions were obtained through administration of several instruments. Weekly reports of problems and stress levels were solicited through the Problem and Stress Report Form (PSRF), administered weekly during the school year. Concern levels were assessed with the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoC) (Hall, George, & Rutherford, 1977), administered three times (summer, fall and spring). The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) (Cattell, Eber, & Tatauoka, 1970) was used to assess personality characteristics. Age, subject specializations, and undergraduate grade point averages were obtained from the records of the college and university.

The SoC is a 56-item Likert scaled instrument which yields ratings of levels of concerns that Fuller (1969) found preservice teachers to report at different points in time during their preparation and development as novice teachers. The concerns are awareness (Level 0), informational (Level 1), personal (Level 2), management (Level 3), consequence (Level 4), collaboration (Level 5), and refocusing (Level 6). Factor analytic studies (George, 1978: Adams, Hutchinson, & Martray, 1980) resulted in the identification of three major categories of concern yielded by the instrument: concerns about self as a teacher, the tasks of teaching, and the impact of teaching on pupils. Concerns about information and with self are lower level concerns. Upper level concerns are associated with task and impact.

The 16PF consists of a multidimensional set of sixteen questionnaire scales, arranged in omnibus form. Sten scores are yielded on 12 primary and four secondary source personality traits. The major problem experienced each week of the internship was reported by all subjects through use of an open-ended question. Stress levels were reported using a 1 to 10 scale. Problems were translated into quantitative indicators by rating the concerns implied in the problems using the SoC model.

Data Analyses

Problems and stress data analyzed were those obtained at four times: weeks 1, 6, 13, and 28 of the school year. The selection of these points in time was based on recognizing that the first week of teaching (week 1), along with the end of the first six-weeks period (week 6), and the end of the first semester (week 13), reflect institutional pressures, or context factors, which impact on the interns and are thus worthy of examination. Week 28 during the spring semester was selected as representative of the time when the subjects should have achieved stability in their roles.

For statistical comparisons, subjects were classified as older or younger than 30 and high or low on undergraduate grade point averages (< 3.1 and > 3.1). Subjects were classified as low on personality factors with sten scores of 5 or less and high with stens of 6 or greater. They were grouped on the basis of two broad subject area specializations: (a) mathematics/science and (b) language, social studies, fine arts. These classifications, or independent variables, were used in testing for significant differences in the dependent variables of stress, problems, and concerns. Significant differences were determined through use of t tests for independent means and analysis of variance. The Scheffe procedure was used in post hoc treatments.

Findings

1. Do interns reflect variations in concerns at selected times during the teaching internship?

As shown in Table 1, statistically significant differences were found between time periods for 5 levels of concerns: awareness, information, personal, management, and refocusing. Self concerns were more intense during the summer with reductions noted in the fall and spring semesters. Management concerns increased in the fall, when they were having their initial teaching experiences and declined during the spring, when role stability should have been attained. Refocusing concerns increased in the spring as expected.

Significant variations between the three cohorts of interns were found for awareness, consequence and refocusing. Cohort three reflected

low awareness and high refocusing concerns in the summer. Cohort one reflected low concern for consequence initially, which declined to an even lower level by the spring. Significant interactions between the cohorts and time periods were observed for awareness and management. Again, cohort three reflected a low level of awareness concern which continued to decline over the duration of the internship. The other two cohorts, however, reflected high initial awareness concern which declined later but not to the extent observed for cohort three. Management concern decreased for cohort one after the summer and increased for the other cohorts during the fall, as expected, when they were engaged in teaching. A reduction in management concern in the spring was found for cohort two only.

2. Do interns vary in concerns according to undergraduate grade point averages, subject area specialization, age and personality factors?

When SoC levels were analyzed by age, GPA, and subject area specializations, several variations were found. Interns with lower grade point averages reflected higher collaboration and refocusing concerns during the summer (Table 2). Younger interns expressed higher concern for information in the summer and higher consequence and refocusing concerns during the fall (Table 3). The concerns reported by the younger interns in the summer and fall were less prevalent in the spring. A comparison of concerns by teaching area revealed that interns teaching mathematics and science reflected a higher concern for awareness during the spring semester than did interns teaching language, social studies or the arts (Table 4).

When the subjects were grouped according to personality factors, several significant variations were present. These were associated with the factors of emotional stability, abstract thinking and enthusiasm, and the two composite traits of experimenting and controlled/disciplined. Less emotionally-stable interns (Table 5) reflected higher management concern in the fall; those classified as lower in abstract thinking reflected more consequence concern during the spring; those low in enthusiasm reported higher consequence concern in the spring. Less experimentally-oriented subjects reflected higher informational and consequence concerns in the spring; less controlled/disciplined subjects registered higher awareness concerns in the summer.

3. Do interns vary in stress levels and concerns reflected in problems

at selected times during the internship?

No significant variations were found for concern levels reflected in weekly problems or stress levels observed at four points in time.

4. Do interns vary in stress levels and concerns reflected in weekly problems according to undergraduate grade point averages, subject area specialization, age, and personality factors?

No significant differences were found for concerns reflected in weekly problems or stress levels of intern groups based on age, undergraduate grade point averages, and subject area specializations. For personality factors (Table 6), more venturesome and more tender-minded/sensitive subjects reported less stress during week 13, the end of the first semester of teaching. Differences in concern levels of weekly problems were found when the fall semester began (week 1), when more suspicious or skeptical subjects reported problems reflecting self concerns.

Conclusions

The cohorts were found to be similar in progressing through phases of the SoC, which empirically validates Fuller's theoretical model. Most variations noted early did not exist at the end of the transition experiences. In light of this, it appears that the combination of an extended period of time in order to adjust to the demands of the school as a workplace, along with campus-based and school-site instruction and support assisted the interns in dealing with the problems and affective dimensions of learning to teach. The trauma typically associated with beginning to teach is not reflected in the data utilized here. Findings do not appear to support various claims regarding the inadequacies of conceptual/structural links between teacher preparation and induction (Sykes, 1983; Nemser, 1983). University and the school sites linkages which support induction experiences appear to be present in this preparation/transition design.

Variations existing between the three cohorts cannot be fully explained and may have resulted, in part, from program changes during the three year period. Another possible influence may be improved mentoring support evolving during the same period. Since the two later cohorts moved earlier to impact and consequence concerns, it may be that modifications in summer coursework, the year-long professional

seminars, and mentoring support had differential impact over the three year period.

Personality factors examined here were found to be associated with few variations in concerns, problems or stress levels. One difference noted during the summer was in awareness concerns between less and more controlled/disciplined interns. During the fall, less emotionally stable or mature interns reflected higher management concern. Less enthusiastic and less experimenting interns had higher consequence concerns during the spring semester. These differences could be anticipated. What is surprising is the lack of variations found in concern levels by personality types. This finding does not support the importance some writers have given to personality factors as being major contributors to transition problems associated with novice teachers (McDonald and Elias, 1983). Concern variations observed during the fall semester between the younger and older interns are difficult to interpret. Additional study focusing on the age factor seems warranted.

Variations noted during the summer between interns with high and low GPAs indicate that those with more successful college experiences do not reflect the intensity of impact concerns less able students have. This may be due to the factors of independence and confidence associated with more successful undergraduate study experiences.

The findings are of importance to the current reform efforts in teacher education, indicating that the internship can assist subjects in different age groups, with diverse personality orientations and varying success as undergraduates in mastering transition into teaching. Moreover, subjects at the end of their internships reflected more intense consequence concerns than would be expected of teachers with one year of experience. According to the Fuller's theory, concerns should remain focused on self and task during this early stage of teaching. The findings support the contention that the year-long internship and transition support can be an effective way of assisting beginning teachers in moving through the developmental stages of learning to teach.

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Table 1

SoC Means By Time for Three Cohorts of Interns

	1 (n=10)	2 (n=19)	3 (n=13)	Time	F
Refocusing (Level 6)					
Summer	50.90	39.68	68.54	51.29	C 4.90**
Fall	58.10	73.32	81.23	72.14	T 12.12*
Spring	69.30	75.74	82.31	76.24	CxT 1.96
Cohort	59.43	62.91	77.36		
Collaboration (Level 5)					
Summer	65.80	54.68	61.62	59.48	C 1.18
Fall	64.80	53.31	55.92	56.86	T .51
Spring	68.70	58.53	57.54	60.64	CxT .25
Cohort	66.43	55.51	58.36		
Consequence (Level 4					
Summer	51.00	74.53	72.92	68.43	C 5.03**
Fall	54.50	64.79	68.15	63.38	T 1.06
Spring	44.90	68.11	67.15	62.29	CxT .54
Cohort	50.13	69.14	69.41		
Management (Level 3)					
Summer	72.70	47.74	67.92	59.93	C 1.43
Fall	66.70	77.05	85.23	77.12	T 6.98**
Spring	58.40	67.95	70.77	66.55	CxT 4.83**
Cohort	65.93	64.25	74.64		
Personal (Level 2)					
Summer	84.30	72.84	72.23	75.38	C 1.82
Fall	77.50	65.74	65.23	68.38	T 4.08*
Spring	73.00	62.00	67.62	66.40	CxT .29
Cohort	78.27	66.89	68.36		
Informational (Level 1)					
Summer	78.90	82.42	67.77	77.05	C .21
Fall	71.40	66.05	68.15	67.98	T 3.81*
Spring	70.20	64.00	74.31	68.67	CxT 3.43**
Cohort	73.50	70.82	70.07		
Awareness (Level 0)					
Summer	75.00	63.42	43.54	60.02	C 10.65**
Fall	53.30	58.16	36.46	50.29	T 10.55**
Spring	40.40	48.26	27.31	39.90	CxT .88
Cohort	56.23	56.61	35.76		

*p < .05 **p < .01

Table 2

Significant Differences in Soc Levels by Undergraduate Grade Point Average

Level	Time		Grade Point Average		
			Low	High	
			X	X	t
Refocusing (6)	Summer	57.84	39.19	1.99*	
Collaboration (5)	Summer		66.92	46.56	2.44*

*p < .05

Table 3

Significant Differences in SoC Levels by Subject Area Specialization

Level	Time	Subject Area		
		Mathematics/Sci	Lang/SocSt/Arts	
		X	X	t
Awareness (0)	Spring	48.83	31.38	2.71*

*p < .05

Table 4

Significant Differences in SoC Levels by Age Groups

Level	Time	Age Groups		
		<30	>30	
		X	X	t
Refocusing (6)	Fall	78.08	63.41	2.02*
Consequence (4)	Fall	70.80	52.47	2.73*
Informational (1)	Fall	74.16	58.88	3.17*

*p < .05

Table 5

Significant Differences in SoC Levels by Personality Factors

Factor	Concern	Time	Low	High	X	X	t
Emotionally Stable/Mature		Management (3)		Fall	84.94	70.00	2.41*
Enthusiastic Impulsive		Consequence (4)		Spring	71.73	58.21	2.04*
Experimenting		Consequence (4)		Spring	72.27	58.00	2.31*
		Informational (1)		Spring	79.36	63.14	2.64*
Controlling/ Disciplined		Awareness (0)		Summer	70.73	53.63	2.29*

*p < .05

Table 6

Significant Differences in Problems and Stress Levels by Personality Factors

Factor	Variable	Time	Low	High	
			X	X	t
Venturesome/Bold	Stress	Week 13	6.71	5.00	2.23*
Tender-minded/ Sensitive	Stress	Week 13	7.88	5.20	3.37*
Suspicious/ Skeptical	Problems	Week 1	2.79	3.85	2.07*

*p < .05